

Newspaper Articles

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(1) Papal Blunder on Buddhism - Further Observations

[**The Sunday Times** - Published on 04.12.94]

We are very appreciative of the high degree of intellectual honesty and journalistic fairness displayed by the **The Sunday Times** of November 27, 1994, in making a complete publication under its **FEATURES** of three items relating to the recent typhonic outburst under the caption **Papal Blunder on Buddhism**. It is both tragic and disgracefully lamentable that one has to take up an issue like this at this juncture, when the person who stands accused in the world press on this act of indiscretion is none other than His Holiness, whom this country did not mind hosting as a friendly guest. We give below a few samples of our friendliness and our very sincere words of welcome to His Holiness which we have already submitted to the Catholic heirarchy in Sri Lanka at their request.

The news about the controversial chapter on the Buddha from Pope John Paul II' s book **Crossing the Threshold of Hope** reached us a few weeks ago. Knowing the Pope to be what he is, we took it easy. His references to Buddhism which were conveyed to us in brief did not surprise us at all. But now, thanks to the **Sunday Times**, the candid cameo is before us. For full details of Papal misrepresentations of Buddhist teachings and for severe hard-hitting criticisms of

these in the British Press, please see **Sunday Times** of 27.11.94 .

As the head of a world conquering movement, we are not surprised that the Pope is both inclined and obliged to play the conqueror all the time, wherever he goes. Besides, and for the same reason, we do not even for a moment expect of him the same dignified academic detachment in the study and assessment of other religions that we would expect from elsewhere, from persons with less involvement and much less investment. Obviously, to err is human, even for a Pope. And to forgive, having pointed out to the offender his offense, is truly divine at a down-to-earth level. But it must be remembered with an acceptable degree of sanity, that there are areas in the lives of a people where even angels fear to tread. At the same time, let not one lose sight of the fact that the entire world today, inspite of all international strategic indoctrination, is educated and alert enough to decry religious totalitarianism.

But with all movements of intellectual or religious aggressiveness as reflected in the document referred to above, there must necessarily follow responses of defense which can at times be bitterly pungent. Do not be surprised or be dismayed. Read the **Sunday Times** of 27.11.94 again for what **Ken Holmes** says under **Papal Blunder on Buddhism** and the **Independence Weekend's** article **What gets up the Pope's Nose**. Persons who are Buddhists by birth or by conviction, anywhere in the world, or any serious students of Buddhism, would have reacted not very differently. Nor would it be possible or necessary at all to tone down their comments. Somebody at the very top has made a *faux pas*. This is true and the Pope seems to indulge in this kind of thing quite often. After his visit to Denver in the USA last year, he did provoke some caustic remarks regarding, what other fellow Christians in America alleged, his bedroom theology. Sri Lankans are not any less sensitive in such situations.

The Pope's fundamental thesis which he wants everybody else in the world to accept appears to be that God created the world and entrusted it to man, [apparently admitting all the defects of Godly creation and man's need to put

them right], requiring him **to strive as his task for its transformation and perfection** [p.88 of his book]. More than two millennia of world history is proving today that both parties are labouring under a delusion . Little or nothing of the promises have ever been fulfilled. Neither man nor the world has been transformed or perfected.

Buddhism's message is that the miscreant or miscreated man [or with whatever other assessment he is presented], must first discover and discipline himself and put himself in proper relationship with the world in which he lives. That logically and invariably eliminates the need to look for a **Redeemer** besides oneself. That is the idea of **culture** or *bhāvanā* [meditation] in Buddhism.

This is far from the Pope's Don Quixotic or hallucinatory vision of **indifference** in Buddhism. Such personal self-culture as promulgated in Buddhism brings about total harmony in the universe, by nurturing and strengthening interpersonal relationships. The choice is yours. It is presumptuous on the part of anyone, on any pedestal, to ask of the Buddhist **Do we draw near to God in this way?** [p.86 of his book]. Why do we need to? Buddhism makes no secret of it that the idea of **God** is fiction. Take it or leave it. The Pope's message tantamounts to theological steamrolling.

As expressive of our friendly but very precise and honest stand in these matters, let me reproduce some portions of a welcome note we have already sent up, well before this uncalled -for distasteful comments about Buddhism came to light, relating to the visit of His Holiness.

“The Buddha was tolerant and inoffensive in the presentation of his point of view to others. At the same time, he displayed a positive reluctance and a total dislike to invade into the territories of others. He desisted from expanding his religious frontiers through conquests or conversions. In all lands where the Buddhist religion spread, it was warmly received and welcomed.

Buddhism did not choose the people. People chose Buddhism. Such is the

story of Buddhism in Sri Lanka too. With more than seventy per cent of the population of Sri Lanka being within the territory of Buddhism, segments of other major world religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam have existed in this country up to date.

These introductory remarks give me greater leverage to welcome Your Holiness to our island country of Sri Lanka and I do it with deep feelings of friendship and brotherhood. Let us as religious leaders, Your Holiness, enter or perhaps re-enter the world with this message of loving kindness, unmindful of religious differences, ethnic arrogance and political supremacy. Humanity is seen bleeding to death all around us. Let each one, within the threshold of his or her own religious upbringing, display before the world the immense divine stature to which we as humans can rise, in this very existence, with the development of our own Inner Power.

I am confident that you will leave behind with us, in your performance during your stay here, a cherished memory which we can carry forward with pride to the next century."

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(2) Our Youth and our Aspiration for a multi-dimensional National Efflorescence through them

[Daily News 2550]

Professor Dhammavihari Thera

I start with a little bit of doubt in my mind whether today's scientific position that 'the mind of the unborn child in the mother's womb is pre-monitored' is adequately known, even in learned circles in our country. Being ill-informed is only one cause of the malaise. Pride and prejudice often prevent many persons from accepting a point of view different from what they have inherited through generations of religious and cultural traditions. Be that whatever it may, I proceed from the stand indicated above, abundantly supported by evidence furnished through Buddhist teachings. A change of heart is a possibility, if people ever want it. Do people want it? There lies the question.

To the Buddhist, life on this earth, of man or beast, is not a product of any one's creation. This is being more and more accepted in the world of learning today. Our life here is just a single phase of a ceaseless process that evolves through time and space. Life continuance in the universe is a self-operating process which, when viewed with a realist's vision, has more to complain about than rejoice over [*appassādā kāmā vuttā Bhagavatā bahu-dukkhā bahu-upāyāsā*]. This is the underlying basic reason for the prayer 'thy kingdom come', made almost in all religions, for something more blissful beyond the present.

As far as Buddhists are concerned, believe me, it is no more than the bliss of terminating what is painfully present here, generated by us in the process of living in the world [*kicchaṃ vatā'yaṃ loko āpanno*]. How we explain our position in our life here and work out an escape out of it makes the difference between religions of the world. Nothing is lost in agreeing to disagree. No conversions, ethical or unethical are therefore needed among people with any sanity in their heads. We do not need to take people over to any side to promise them temporary comfort.

This life continuity through time and space which the Buddhists accept is

referred to as *Samsāra* or continuous journeying, i.e. the human life process which does not end in one's death. During this process, what we do and how we do them determine the quality of our subsequent lives, for better or for worse. This is what is referred to as the operation of the law of *kamma* [Skt. *karman*]. *Kamma*, I tell you, is not the rustic law of 'a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye', as is made out to be in certain questionable books and by certain erudite preachers, both monk and layman. Read carefully Anguttara Nikaya [Vol.I.249] for the Buddha's emphatic rejection of this heretical position. But this has raised its ugly head again and again in books written centuries later. Do not forget that Buddhist books, even of the Theravadins, were not all written down at one sitting. But such books have been denounced and rejected from time to time as unacceptable by schools of diligent monks of Sri Lanka who at the time were known at the as Dīgha-bhāṇakas [See DA.III.15].

Now it should be clear to any student of Buddhism that the Buddhists have to begin believing that human life in a mother's womb begins with an indelibly recorded report from the past. Everyone of us is going to be directed in our lives by what we have been before in former existences. These psychic transmissions from a previous life to the present, skills or defects, are referred to as *āsaya / anusaya* or underlying traces or tendencies of the mind [See MN.I.433] which give direction to the new life which starts its continued new phase. At this stage, they are quite independent of parental patterns and are not produced through heritage or the influence of environment. It is our belief that the pattern of the new life emerging here, while in the mother's womb, whether with [pre-natal?] and post-natal grooming, will considerably depend on this stock-in-trade which humans inherit from their past.

This is where we as Buddhists have to begin talking about our youth. They are our boys and girls born into families where parental love of a responsible mother and father has to await their arrival, with a loving and warm welcome. Even test-tube babies, at the moment, have to grow within a mother, at least a

surrogate one. Buddhist texts therefore refer to parents as progenitors or *āpādakā*. Even a non-Buddhist law book like the Manusmṛti of India elevates the role of woman as the generator of life [*prajananārthaṃ striyah sṛṣṭhāḥ*], saying that she needs to be put on an equal footing with the male who only provides the seeds of life [*santānārthañ ca māṇavaḥ*].

It is with a deep awareness and a serious concern about the responsibilities that parents have to accept in rearing the children they beget that Buddhist teachings take great pains to enunciate the theme of child care and growth of love. They are referred to in Sinhala as *satara saṅgraha vastu* [in Pali *cattāri saṅgaha-vatthūni* at AN.II.32] or four modes of taking proper care of children. It is emphatically stated in this context that in homes where these four modes of attention on children are not found to be prevalent, the parents shall never receive any respect [*mānaṃ*] or loving care [*pūjaṃ*] from their children. Buddhist texts refer in Pali to this respectful attitude of children towards their parents as *namasseyya* and to their loving care of them as *sakkareyya*.

We feel here that Sri Lankan parents, whether below thirty or above thirty, should fully well appreciate the meaning of their Sinhala equivalents like *namas-kāra* and *sat-kāra* of the children towards the parents and treat them as a vital ingredient in the cultural growth of the children. It is this loving and honourable link between parents and children which contributes to the children inheriting with ease from the older generation in the home, the parents and grand parents, the contents of their cultural heritage. It has virtually become a missing link in our society today, almost globally. This is ravagingly prevalent everywhere as the generation gap. It is this that has inevitably led to world-wide teenage stress. Analysing with vision and a commendable degree of honesty, and I tell you this with pride, Charmaine Saunders of Australia writes adequately on this subject in her delightful book *Teenage Stress*.

One of the basic items of the cultural growth of man, we would consider, is this healthy integration of the membership of the community into a loveable

harmonious whole, a unit within which distrust, envy and rivalry are at their minimum. In handling this subject, grooming of our youth needs to get priority over the rest. These pathological traits are the symptoms of the unidentified malaise of our society at large, everywhere. Mankind, all the world over, east or west, nations large and small, are sick on account of their insatiable greed for eminence through power, their possessions and their prestige on account of unimaginable achievements. These pathological patterns of aggressive competition flow over to individuals in society, both young and old, openly and secretly. It is these that give rise to cliques of socially harmful venomous groups, quite often ethnically and religiously aligned.

Youth Brigades of Adolf Hitler, organised in Germany some time prior to World War II, are among some of the earliest known to us in this area of human exploitation. Humans are de-humanised, and are ruthlessly compelled to fit into patterns of diabolic behaviour of killing humans, destroying institutions and devastating everything that stands on the other side of one's thinking, ethnically, religiously and politically. It is happening around us here, even today, forcibly mobilising children of tender age for so-called national military service. These are no more and no less than maniacal behaviour of glorified national and religious leaders all the world over. They rise to fame, during their life time and even after death, through misguided literary productions, ill-conceived works of art and even religious eulogies. It is time now to courageously call a halt to this.

Our theme in the world today should be 'man in the service of man'. And not the conquest of man, through force of arms, pressure or artful persuasion, with globalisation included. As Buddhists, let us be honest to ourselves. Our primary aspiration, religiously, is self-liberation. As we celebrate jubilees over jubilees, gleeful over their frequency and their flamboyance, it would do us good as Buddhists to know and realise how much ground we are gaining in the direction of our supreme goal of transcendental Nirvana, with the time and money we spend over our so-called state patronised or privately sponsored religious

activities.

At this juncture in our history, both religious and cultural, it is important to realise that our youth, of whatever religious or ethnic identity, should not be caught up in mass movements of religious and national fanaticism and be led by the nose, without an awareness as to where they are being led up to. Our youth in particular must first be given the time and the opportunity to study and become aware of the religious and cultural history of the land of their birth, with their peaceful co-existence and mutual appreciation. The home and the school must necessarily be venues for this. However, every sensible person in this country must know that both these places, the home and the school, have suffered in recent decades, a great deal of pre-tsunami erosion, nearer to and further from the sea.

As a result of this, large segments of our youth in every sector of the land, religion wise and ethnicity wise, have been brain-washed and reduced to empty shells in which bombs of Hiroshima type can be packed. Suicidal ethnic groups and religiously founded militant fighting gangs within this country today are a result of this. Think back of the times when we, as school-going children seventy, eighty years ago, sang in unison in a Sinhala Buddhist school this song, with an unquestionable sense of piety and devotion.

Gaṇadeviyo nuvaṇa denna

Sarasvatī pahalavenna.

We had at the time assimilated a good deal of such multi-ethnic, multi-religious culture of the land. We learnt it, imperceptibly though, in our homes and the school. Even the presence of the *Satara Devāle* within the premises of Buddhist temples is adequate evidence of this peaceful process of assimilation and accommodation in our culture. The presence of chapels for Hindu divinities in the palace yard of Polonnaruwa is still further proof of this magnanimity even as far back as a thousand years in our history. Consciously or otherwise, any

challenge thrown at this nature's own historical process, or any hostility shown to it by over-stimulated, self-glorifying impulsive humans bring destruction and disaster on mankind everywhere. Wars are not an expression of the wrath or command of the divines above. These are bush-fires started by misguided humans everywhere.

Viewing seriously the menacing witches' brew of politics in which we are plunged today, not forgetting even the very recent ethnic, religious and political contributions made towards it from all segments within Sri Lanka and their ex-patriot allies living outside and equally well stirred by bargain hunting international groups, we feel the need to focus on the earliest discernible rot in Sri Lankan body politic. The picture is reasonably clear. with the sore points considerably identifiable. In spite of partialities and preferences of individuals, we may trace a few unquestionable ones.

Simple isolated events in the history of a country are often distorted and stretched out of proportion by super-grade but thoroughly misguided and mischievous writers, unfortunately even elevated and glorified at times as great writers and chroniclers. Very early Sri Lankan history, within a few centuries after the introduction of Buddhism into the land, had to face a considerable amount of annoying hostility from its non-Buddhist minority residents and at times even from their neighbours who made ill-judged alliances with the latter. The demographically larger community are said to have contained and accommodated the minorities with dignity and respect and drawn them into the new cultural framework that was emerging. Recorded history of the time of the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka testifies to this. Anecdotes related about persons like Brahmin Tivakka in the Mahāvamsa are proof of this.

But quite soon a minority leader assumed rulership in the northern capital of Anuradhapura. Records, both classical and popular, show that he appears to have turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to the ravaging acts of vandalism such as breaking into Buddhist *stupas* in search of treasures, cutting down Bodhi trees

etc. perpetrated by the minority groups on the cultural heritage of the Sinhala Buddhists. [See Paranavitana in the University History of Ceylon Vol. I. Part II. p. 563]. For a more detailed and authentic record of these misdeeds see Critical Studies On the Early History of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by Professor Dhammavihari Thera, published by the Buddhist Cultural Centre, 2003].

The ruling house of Ruhuna in the southern territory of Sri Lanaka, under the leadership of Kākavaṇṇa Tissa [i.e. father of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi, also known as Kāvantissa], took note of these outrageous activities with alarm. The old king, with his political sagacity and his one and only interest to protect his subjects and their cultural heritage, felt the need to stem the tide without delay. On the route from the south to the north of the island, in places like Digāmadulla, he set up garrison towns and kept them well stocked with food supplies.

His son, young Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, we have more than adequate evidence to believe, sensed these rumblings and girded his loins, awaiting the appropriate time to launch his attack of defence. It is this honest awareness of the role of kingship, or of political leadership as we would look upon today, to protect and preserve the cultural heritage of the people over whom one rules, that prompted Kākavaṇṇa Tissa and his entire household, including his queen Vihara Devī and his two sons, to gather a solid opposition against the vandals who were amassing a diabolic force of destruction against the majority community and their culture. It would have been shameful for the ruling house to have put the telescope on the blind eye.

What was happening in Anurādhapura had to be judged as the first signs of the plague. Both Kākavaṇṇa Tissa and his son Duṭṭhagāmaṇī had regular reports of what was happening there. Rulers of the land had to be extremely receptive and sensitive to the dangers to the nation. The culture in Sri Lanka that was being artfully destroyed as described above was none other than Buddhism. They made no secret of it that they were determined to put an end to this menace. The planned scheme of the vandals left no room in the hands of these

diligent guardians of the people and their culture for stultifying treatises.

Duṭṭhagāmanī was obviously a man of expeditious action, much more than his father. He knew the time to strike. It is even said that he disobeyed his father who dissuaded him from going to war too soon. In these which appear to us as strange and divergent observations of the Mahāvamsa, even contradictory at times, we see a clear disagreement in the minds of the chroniclers who wrote about the event more than five hundred years later. They are seen attempting to digest and assimilate conflicting judgements of later generations. The Mahāvamsa is, at times, definitely an inconsistent bundle of divergent mixed ideas.

The Mahāvamsa tells us that Duṭṭhagāmanī, after his victory in the battle with Elara grieved over the loss of lives in the encounter [Mhv.Chap. xxv. v.28]. But we discover in an equally authentic text that says that he could not sleep for joy over his victory over the enemy [DA.II.640]. One line of chroniclers attempt to portray Elara, the Tamil king of Anurādhapura whom Duṭṭhagāmanī had to displace for his neglect in the care and protection of Buddhism as a pious and devoted ruler who was close to the monastic community. He appears to have displayed a heart-winning veneer of Buddhism. He was, in his policies, obviously under the pressure of those who got him there.

It was to put things right without a wanton loss of life in the process of hand to hand fighting here and there, that Duṭṭhagāmanī challenged Elara to a direct combat. That was the be all and end all of Duṭṭhagāmanī's war against Elara. The overall suzerainty of Buddhism in Sri Lanka had to be admitted and accepted. It was so received not only here but in the whole of the then known Buddhist world, including the middle eastern countries of Iran and Iraq and others. If what happened then is correctly known today, there shall then be no bitter quarrels in multi-ethnic multi-religious countries, even elsewhere.

In the drama that was enacted in the early centuries of Sri Lankan history,

Duṭṭhagāmanī is not to be misjudged, neither as a nationalist fanatic nor as a religious crusader. We know of many researchers who have received postgraduate awards on their misdirected theses in this area. Duṭṭhagāmanī's was not a war of aggrandisement. It was no more and no less than a defence of our own right within our own territory. A ruler who was incapable maintaining law and order within the land he was ruling over had to be got rid of.

Sri lankan writers, either in their vanity or in their believed-in literary ingenuity have, many a time, disclosed their naked ignorance. Many writers of all grades of more recent times, both monks and equally eminent laymen, in their writings and their newer and larger translations of the Mahāvamsa, have blundered in trying to establish that Duṭṭhagāmanī went to war carrying relics of the Buddha in a killer weapon, his spear. To any one who knows the culture of the people of this country and their religious honesty and sincerity, this is an unimaginable position. This is the stubborn way they want to translate the Pali word *kunta* in the Mahāvamsa statement *kunte dhātuṃ nidhāpetvā* [at Mahāvamsa ch. xxv. v.1]. To assess the grossness and wildness of this blunder, one only needs to glance through three Sinhala classics of more than ten centuries ago which consistently maintain that the king carried the relics in his royal sceptre.

They are: no.1. the 13 th century Thūpavamsaya which refers to it as *dhātu sahita jaya kontaya*, 2. 14 th century Saddharmālankāraya adding the words *magul kontaya* to what is said in the Thūpavamsaya, and 3. the 15th century Saddharmaratnākaraya which renders it as *dātu pitavū jayamaha kontaya*. For the benefit of our researchers, national and international, are we to put these bits of invaluable and indispensable evidence on Braille?

Purge the minds of all our youth, irrespective of all ethno-religious differences, and facing the indisputable facts of history, learn to live in peace and concord. Let us not fight like Kilkenny cats to the bitter end of every one.

As Buddhism repeatedly says it is *avidyā* or stupidity and ignorance which

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underlie all bitterness and consequent grief in the world.

